

St Nicholas Priory



**A day in the life of a
Wealthy Merchant**

Dear friend,

My name is William Hurst and I live at the old Priory with my wife, Mary, and son, William. I come from a line of wealthy merchants and important people - my father used to be the Mayor of Exeter!

I am a merchant, buying and selling Exeter's fine woollen cloth and shipping it to ports across the world. We export cloth to London, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain, to name a few - which makes me a very wealthy man. I earn up to £200 a year, about £45,000 in your modern money!

The Woollen Cloth trade has made Exeter a well-known and rich city, and many people who live here are employed in the industry. Many of the merchants and craftspeople in the trade are in a Guild based at Tuckers Hall. The Guild makes sure that all of the cloth made and sold in Exeter is good quality. I hope that my son, William, will become a merchant one day - if he can learn to behave in school! It is a privilege to be able to afford to send him to school. A lot of children have to be working at his age!

I have used my wealth to decorate the hall with the latest in Tudor fashions, like the Plaster ceiling in the parlour and the colourful drapes in the bedroom. I also wear a lot of expensive clothing, made with rare dyes and imported material. Appearance and style are important in the Tudor period - I wouldn't want people to think I can't afford nice things.

After the servants bring me my breakfast, I start work. A lot of my time is spent writing letters and keeping records of my stock at the Customs House. I only work during the week and have my weekends free for entertainment! Often, in the evenings, we will have important guests over and the cooks will serve amazing food! My favourite is roasted boar and we tend to eat a lot of fresh or exotic meat.

Meat is a luxury because it can be so expensive and we have nowhere to store it so it doesn't turn rotten. We wash it all down with a lot of wine because the water in the city isn't very clean and can make people sick.

Yours sincerely,

William Hurst

Activities

Do you think William is higher status or lower status? Why?

**William and Mary left their initials in the Parlour, can you find them?
Why do you think they left their mark?**

Can you list the luxuries and privileges that the Hurst family have because of their wealth? Is there anything that wouldn't be considered a privilege nowadays?

Which rooms in the Priory are the most highly decorated? Why do you think the Hurst's focused on these rooms?

Write a letter back to William, comparing how your lives are the same and how they are different. Do you have any questions for him about life as a wealthy merchant in the Tudor period?